

State Commission

The Kansas Volunteer Commission manages a portfolio of eight AmeriCorps State programs addressing critical needs in the areas of education, health, environment, economic opportunity, disaster and capacity building. In the 2014-2015 program year, more than 1,600 volunteers were recruited by roughly 125 AmeriCorps members serving across Kansas. The Commission also manages four Volunteer Generation Fund grantees as part of the Kansas Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) Mentoring Initiative. In 2015, the Initiative recruited over 111 STEM Mentors who served 613 youth. Additionally, the Commission houses the Kansas Mentors program, which provides leadership and support to over 150 mentoring organizations. Through a partnership with Volunteer Kansas, the Kansas Mentors program awarded \$28,310 in background check funding to mentoring organizations to ensure that Kansas youth have a safe mentoring experience.

AmeriCorps State

YMCA of Greater Kansas City has five Youth Volunteer Corps members who work with economically disadvantaged students, ages 11 to 18. In parts of Kansas City, high school graduation rates are around 65 percent, approximately 42 percent of students do not perform at grade-level, and 90 percent of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. To help address these challenges, the AmeriCorps members empower the students through service learning, teaching them to identify needs in the community and work on solutions. During school sessions, the members lead students in an investigation of a topic, a related service project, and a reflection. They also set up opportunities for middle and high school students to volunteer at elementary schools and community organizations. In the past year, 660 students each completed more than 18 hours of service. When the students were surveyed, 75 percent said they had a better attitudes about school as a result of the program, 89 percent believed more strongly that school is important to their life and future, and 90 percent said they would try harder in school.

The 70 members of the Kansas Outdoor AmeriCorps Action Team serve in state parks and local communities throughout Kansas. Environmental changes have increased the number of acres infested by invasive species across the state, which affects native plants and species composition. The AmeriCorps members identify and eradicate invasive species, remove dead trees and plant new ones, help with controlled burns, evaluate shorelines, and improve public land. In the past year, the AmeriCorps members completed 248 projects. They maintained trails, planted trees, taught educational programs, removed debris, and removed invasive species. They improved 9,767 acres and maintained, resurfaced, and trimmed vegetation surrounding more than 300 miles of trails. The educational programs that the members taught encourage youth and adults to decrease water consumption and adopt practices that have a positive effect on at-risk ecosystems. The program also trained 51 of the AmeriCorps members in disaster response.

AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA members who serve through the Wichita State University VISTA Fellows project are placed with organizations that support economic opportunity, education, and healthy futures for people in need. The VISTA members help build the organizations' capacity for resource development, data management, volunteer management, and partnership development. All of these efforts increase awareness, sustainability, and support for the organizations. In the past year, the program has quadrupled its service sites and tripled its members so that now, 13 VISTA members serve at 16 sites in rural Newton and the metropolitan communities of Lawrence and Wichita. At the inaugural Civic Leadership and Service Summit, co-sponsored by WSU and the VISTA project, students and VISTA members went to workshops and then did service projects at Rainbows United and Museum of World Treasures. A VISTA member helped coordinate 40 volunteers at the McKinney-Vento Homeless Program's Camp IBA (Imagine, Believe and Achieve). The volunteers provided more than 540 hours of service at the camp, where 80-100 children in transition enjoyed a summer of music and art enrichment activities.

In Kansas City, the Rosedale Development Association's four AmeriCorps VISTA members and the VISTA Leader helped build the association's capacity to provide the community with access to healthy food, minor home repair and emergency assistance, physical activity, and education. In 2015, the VISTA team recruited and managed more than 400 volunteers who served over 2,000 hours. Some of their accomplishments included building new compost systems at community gardens, creating an outreach plan and raising more than \$3,000 for the local farmers market, creating community resource guides for residents who need emergency financial assistance, and starting a new mural-painting program to beautify the neighborhood and engage youth in art. The VISTA members also worked with volunteers and supported an AmeriCorps NCCC team that repaired homes for eight families, and maintained 3.5 miles of nature trail. They coordinated healthy community events which served hundreds of community members and recruited and trained 26 youth sports coaches who coached 14 youth sports teams.

AmeriCorps NCCC

For 12 families that were being transitioned to self-sufficiency, an AmeriCorps NCCC team made their apartments more energy efficient, protected from weather, and safe. The NCCC team partnered with Hillcrest Transitional Housing, a high-accountability program that provides rent-free, utility-free housing, a food pantry, and life-skills counseling and professional services to homeless families. Members also helped stock Hillcrest and provide clothes, furniture, toiletries, and food to families in need. In Kansas City, the team landscaped an entire apartment campus, painted two apartments, sorted 500 pounds of goods at the thrift store, cleaned out seven basements, and installed dehumidifiers.

AmeriCorps NCCC team partnered for service with the Milford Nature Center in Junction City, which is designed to help visitors understand Kansas's diverse natural communities, the importance of these habitats, and the wildlife that depends on them. The NCCC members repaired, painted, and overhauled raptor display pens and wildlife rehabilitation pens. They painted signs and animal fixtures and cleared vegetation from a walking trail to make it more accessible. At the butterfly house, members re-landscaped the pathway and painted benches and the outside of the house. On the playground, the team designed and built a beaver mound that visitors can explore. They removed and replaced the rotting wood in the playground eagle's nest. At the duck maze on the playground, members painted signs, tightened netting, and mulched the trail. Members removed and replaced all the gravel at the raptor cages, painted the outside of each cage, and helped build perches for the birds.

Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

In 2015, the Foster Grandparent Program of Wyandotte County served early childhood education programs at 37 sites and 340 children in grades K-12. At Washington High School, the Foster Grandparents serve students up to 19 years old. The volunteers help daily, one-on-one, with cognitive language skills, reading proficiency, social skills, self-help, and fine/gross motor skills. In Wyandotte County, 34.6 percent of children live in poverty, compared to 19 percent state-wide. In 2014, 65 children in early childhood programs who were helped by Foster Grandparents had gains in social and/or emotional development, which increases their chance of a successful school career. The program also helps the community by helping the Foster Grandparents themselves with case management services and a food distribution program. Fifty Foster Grandparents get food packets from the sponsor – extra help to community members that goes beyond the usual stipend and reimbursements for mileage, meals, and insurance. The additional support helps stretch the low-income volunteer's food dollar.

Senior Corps RSVP

The Sedgwick County RSVP Volunteer Program expanded their Companionship program this past year. It's Care-Ring Caller and Friendly Visitor programs now serve 28 clients. RSVP volunteers 1,854 clients to medical appointments throughout the Sedgwick County Kansas area, including the Veterans Administration Hospital – an overwhelming success of the volunteers' transportation service. The program also provided financial literacy and housing services to 536 clients who needed help with financial matters, which was a far greater number than expected for 2015. The program provided the assistance through a partnership with the AARP Tax-Aide District 16 coordinator and the Kansas Support Services for Elders Program.

Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

The Mental Health Association of South Central Kansas is a Senior Companion Program sponsoring agency. The association provides education, advocacy, and service to help adults in the community have strong mental health and wellness. In 2015, 55 Senior Companion volunteers gave in-home service to 132 clients, which allowed those clients to keep living independently. When they were surveyed, 90 percent of the people who responded said they were very satisfied with their Senior Companion, and 94 percent reported that they were satisfied with their lives because of their Senior Companion. The Senior Companion Program has a strong presence with veterans in the community, serving twenty-eight veterans with in-home services. The program also provides respite service to caregivers. People who care for World War II and Korean War veterans not only deal with their loved ones' post-war trauma, but also with the physical illnesses that these heroes, who served our country so well, experience in their twilight years. The Senior Companions not only gave respite for these family caregivers, but also wonderful friendships to forgotten soldiers.

Social Innovation Fund

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) transforms lives by using evidence to find what works and make it work for more people. The SIF Classic and SIF Pay for Success programs harness the expertise of grant-making intermediaries to identify, evaluate and expand effective nonprofits serving low-income communities across America. The Social Innovation Fund is expanding the impact of one nonprofit in Kansas.

Volunteer Generation Fund

The Kansas STEM Mentoring Initiative is a three-year project with a goal to increase the number of STEM mentors serving the youth of Kansas. After successfully leveraging the Volunteer Generation Fund for the last four years through its Volunteering Kansas project, the Kansas Volunteer Commission is switching its focus to utilize its partnership with the Kansas State Department of Education and Kansas Mentors to continue the momentum of the STEM mentoring movement. The commission has subgranted \$100,000 in funds to four grantees in geographically diverse locations, throughout the state of Kansas, to support and expand new or existing STEM mentoring initiatives. The commission partnered with the Kansas Enrichment Network to develop and deliver training and technical assistance centered on high-quality STEM mentoring and Positive Youth Development concepts.